
URBAN PATTERNS AND POLITIES IN MALAY TRADING CITIES, FIFTEENTH THROUGH SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

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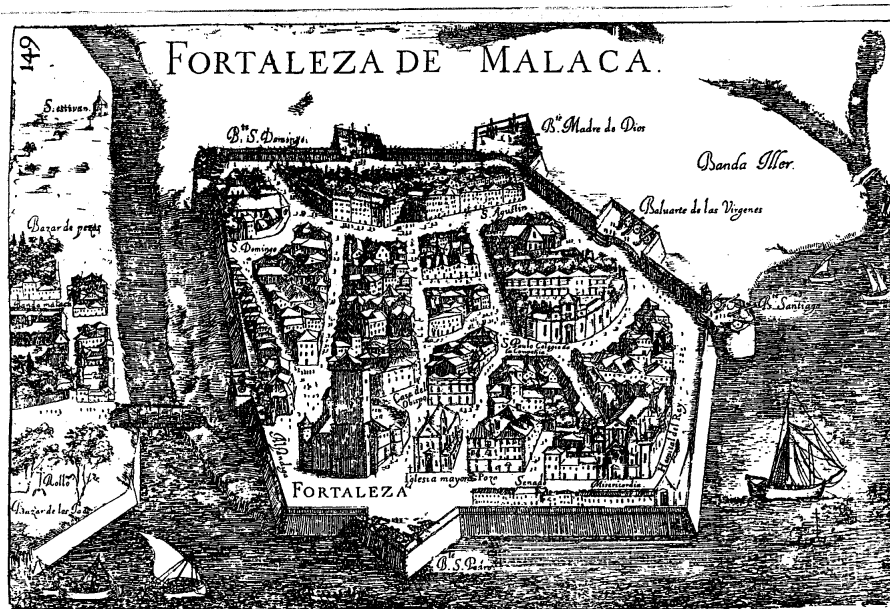
In this talk, I would like briefly to describe Malay urban centers involved in international trade before European intervention brought about drastic changes in their polities. I shall attempt to scrutinize to what extent an analysis of their structures can be helpful for a better understanding of their social organizations, and try to show that their patterns reflect the opposite ideologies that clashed at the turn of the seventeenth century and led to a political revolution.

Structures of Trading Cities

I shall limit my analysis to only three port towns of the Malay world, namely Malacca on the Western coast of the Malay Peninsula, Banten on the west part of the northern Javanese coast, and Aceh on the northern tip of Sumatra. This choice is based on two plain reasons: because at one moment or another during the period spanning from the fifteenth till the seventeenth centuries, these cities were the most important trade centers in the Malay archipelago, and because of their extensive commercial networks, we have at our disposal rather numerous and detailed sources, produced by the Malays themselves or by Chinese or European eyewitnesses, describing these cities;

de Erédia, a person of mixed blood, half Portuguese, who lived there in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This map depicts the situation of the town at the time—that is after one century of Portuguese occupation—but with the help of earlier Portuguese and, to a much lesser extent, also Malay documents, one can roughly reconstruct the structure or at least the main features of the city as they existed before the arrival of the Europeans.

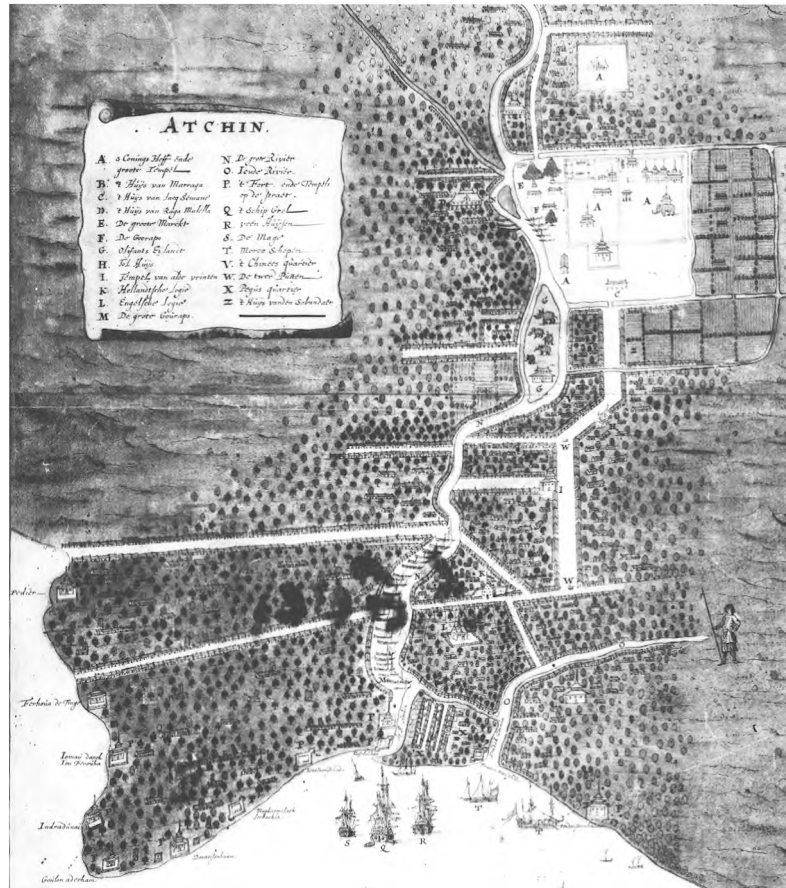
Built between the main river and a smaller one, the fortress replaced the sultan's compound after the Portuguese conquest. Its size can be estimated from another seventeenth-century drawing showing that the wall encompassed a space large enough to contain the European city, which proves that the royal compound was not only occupied by the palace, but included other buildings and dwellings and actually corresponded to the king's city. We know from Malay sources that not long before this time, the sultan's compound was still situated upriver at some distance from the port city surrounding the harbor. Outside the wall, the rest of the town was divided into several separate quarters. Although only two of them bear ethnic names—Chinese and Keling *kampungs*—written sources mention that most of them were inhabited by natives of foreign origin, including Javanese, Gujaratis, Tamils, people from Brunei, Luzon, and so forth.



6. Malacca: The walled city at the beginning of the seventeenth century
(Manuel Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*)

For Aceh, we also have only one rather good map made by the Dutch in the 1640s. The town seems to be not separated from the surrounding forest, which has been only partially cleared to make room for various *kampungs*. The agglomeration, oriented south-north, lies along the river which, together with a straight street, was used as an avenue of communication. The royal compound, surrounded by a moat, consisted of the palace itself facing a large open space, with the mosque on its western side, as is

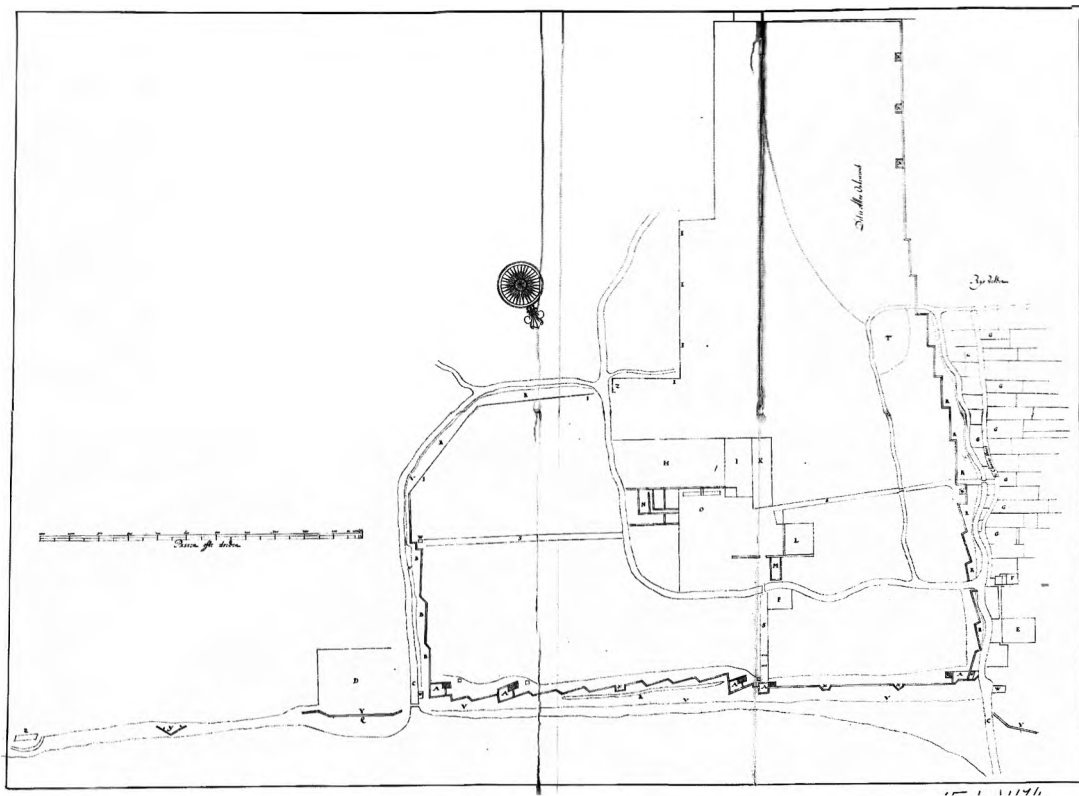
usual in the old Malay cities, and high officials' residences situated nearby. This royal compound was nearly cut off from the *kampungs*, and by comparing it with other old towns such as Pasai, Malacca, and Banten, one can safely guess that when the city was founded, it was yet more clearly separated from the working population. Inhabitants lived in secluded quarters, scattered from the harbor in the north to the royal compound in the south. At least two of the suburbs had an ethnic denomination: Chinese and Peguans.



Aceh, c. 1640 (Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana)

For Banten, we have much more abundant material, three maps and two bird's-eye views of the city from the seventeenth century, the most accurate, shown here, dating from 1659. The river that runs through the city splits into two branches, flowing to the sea by two estuaries, used as harbors, and dividing the town into three parts of unequal size. The central and main part corresponded to the royal city. By contrast with the previous examples, Banten presented the peculiarity of being surrounded by a defense wall. In its center was the royal square, on the sides of which were built the palace and, close by it, the two principal state-ministers' houses, as well as the mosque on the west side. This open space represented the city's heart, physically and also symbolically, the center being embodied by a sacred banyan tree, commonly thought

in Java to be the abode of the town's guardian spirit. Starting from this center, four straight streets, oriented on the points of the compass, roughly divided the royal city into four parts. As this map was made for intelligence purposes, the Dutch mapmaker set out to depict the official compound with great care, leaving the rest of the walled city blank. But written testimonies mention that, outside this compound, the town was divided into many quarters, each of them repeating, on a small scale, the pattern of the town itself, with a square flanked by a lord's mansion and a mosque at the center, the whole being surrounded by clusters of houses. Each quarter was under the control of this aristocratic lord, appointed by the king, and all the people living there were his subjects or his bondsmen. That structure implies that only Bantenese citizens could inhabit the walled city.



Banten in 1659 (Algemeen Rijksarchief, Den Haag, n° VEL 1174)

In the western quarter, called China Town, lived the most important foreign merchants of the country, those involved in international trade, be they Chinese, Europeans, or whatever. For that reason, the administrative centers for trade or foreign affairs, such as the *shahbandar*'s office, the custom's office, the official weight house, the Chinese captain's residence, as well as the four European factories, were situated there.

In the eastern quarter lay the great market of the town, surrounded by shops and dwellings. This part was devoted to retail commerce and craftsmanship. People living in this section were of non-Bantenese origin, coming from remote countries as well as from various parts of the Malay archipelago. Venturing further eastward, a visitor to

the city would encounter a poor suburb inhabited by mariners and fishermen, followed by shipyards and saltworks.

Interpretation

In spite of their apparent differences, these cities reflect quite similar perceptions of social organization. To throw some light on the question, I think it is best to start with the case of Banten. As we have just seen, trade and manufacturing sectors were located outside the city wall, in proximity to both harbors, leaving the central and largest part of the town devoid of any economic activities. The walled city was exclusively inhabited by a population of Bantenese origin, whereas, as a rule, foreigners had to dwell in the two external suburbs. This twofold division of the population implies that in this port city, trade and additional activities representing the bulk of their resources were not directly in the hands of the local population, but were left to foreigners. It goes without saying that the court would draw huge profit from these activities through various taxes, and that some, if not all, of the grandees often used to participate financially in these enterprises, which were otherwise carried out by foreign merchants. Indeed, the gentry owned land, villages, or pepper plantations granted by the king. But the income procured from these agricultural possessions remained low and unchanging, and in no case could it match the huge return earned by trade; this distinction grew even more sharp when the basis of the Bantenese economy shifted from pepper export to commercial exchange. In other words, for their living, the Bantenese population depended almost exclusively upon foreign traders' activities.

If one turns now to the two other cities and compares them with Banten, one observes that they obviously present some similar features. One can find the same physical division between the royal compound and the dwellings of the population involved in harbor activities, who were mainly of foreign origin. Apparently, those people were not distributed among the various *kampungs* on a strict ethnic basis, as place names could suggest, but rather were distributed according to their activities, as we can infer from accounts of Malacca. The main difference between Banten and Malacca and Aceh was that the latter two did not have royal compounds or royal cities as large and as populated as that of Banten.

From these observations, one might attempt to draw some conclusions regarding social organization. Formerly, as far as we know, old trading cities were actually made up of two distinct towns built along the same river; such was clearly the case with Pasai, Banten, and Malacca, where royal compounds and harbor settlements were located several kilometers apart, each town sometimes bearing a different name. This physical split reflected a peculiar perception of society: the harbor population on the shore was turned towards the sea and the sea activities, whereas the king faced landward, indicating that he wanted to be considered as the necessary intermediary between inland and coastal populations. A neat boundary specified the different roles. The king had political power over the land and its populations. The harbor population, of foreign extraction, had the right to settle in the kingdom and to trade in exchange for taxes paid to the king. But as guests of the country, they had no say in political matters. In the course of time, either because population growth led to the building of houses between the two components, as in Aceh, or because of a king's decision to move his

palace near the harbor, as in Malacca or Banten, the two previously split towns moved progressively closer to each other, to the point where they formed a whole. This is the moment depicted by our maps. One would have expected that this new closeness would have led to a blending of men and opinions. If this was the case, it did not last for long; quickly, instead, arose political turmoil that presents in each case all the characteristics of a revolution.

The Social Revolution

In spite of their scarcity, sources on sixteenth-century Aceh enable us to perceive the tragic events that struck the country. In the 1520s, Aceh under the leadership of a local prince overwhelmed the trading cities of the whole northern tip of Sumatra and established itself as the main political and economic power of the region. Some fifty years later, the state faced an acute crisis at the time of a king's succession. Within only one year, three different sultans succeeded one another on the throne, among them an infant aged only some months. This instability resulted from the rivalry between members of the kingdom's elite, called *orangkayas*, whose influence in political affairs had increased to the point that they arrogated the right to elect the sultan. In 1579, they chose an old man for king, persuaded that he would have neither the vigor nor the time to establish strong royal power. It turned out that they were dead wrong. The old man survived fifteen more years and displayed an uncommon eagerness to restore royal prerogatives. To put an end to the excessive influence of the *orangkayas*, he ordered a massacre that went on for several days. According to one testimony, in a single night one thousand of these people perished.

On the crucial question about the *orangkayas'* identity, opinions differ. Some historians have contented themselves with a broad meaning of "elite," while others are of the opinion that this term refers to the landed gentry, and yet others that it refers to the middle class. For reasons that I cannot detail here for lack of time, I definitely support the last opinion. If this interpretation is not wrong, these political events have to be interpreted as an attempt by the middle class to seize or to keep political power and to restrict kingship to a mere ceremonial and symbolic position that even an infant could hold. Aceh had then become a sort of oligarchic republic, with a nominal king at the head, and the bloodbath that marked the beginning of the new king's reign constituted his first endeavor to restore (or it may be to establish) royal power. He could not achieve this goal himself; his task was taken over and completed by his grandson, who succeeded, through brutality, in imposing an absolute royal power upon the country at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

It is easy to find parallels between these events and the situation in Banten. In 1580, under the same circumstances, again involving a royal succession, members of that city's elite chose, among the princes entitled to the throne, an infant as king; the other pretenders would all have had the capacities actually to rule. They formed a regency council which, of course, was weighted totally in their favor. In the absence of a strong royal power, this group ruled the country for at least some thirty years. In the case of Banten, no doubt remains about the elites' social identity: the new rulers were traders and supporters of commercial activities. In short, they belonged to the bourgeois middle class. Like Aceh, Banten had been transformed into a sort of oligarchic

republic. The bourgeois elite succeeded in maintaining control of Bantenese affairs until a spirited prince led his military forces against them. The bourgeoisie did not have the means to resist in the civil war that followed and had to surrender. The prince installed himself as the head of a new regency council and exiled the previous government of commoners and its supporters to a neighboring principality in 1609. According to a Dutch document, seven thousand people were forced to flee. After that, the king assumed absolute power in Banten. That social revolution is reflected by our rare maps. Although very sketchy, the earliest plan of Banten, drawn by the Dutch during their first voyage to the East Indies at the end of the sixteenth century, i.e. before the social revolution, clearly shows the partition of the town into thirds, and its caption, which gives the location of the residences of prominent figures in the town, indicates that some great foreign traders lived within the walled city, that is, within the royal city. In other words, they had invested themselves with political power.

Through these two cases, one can see the drastic changes that occurred in the two main trading kingdoms of the Malay world in the last decades of the sixteenth century and at the turn of the seventeenth century. In both cases, one witnesses the failure of the middle class to structure itself as a political force and to govern permanently. Both attempts were rather short-lived, and the middle class had to accept total submission to the royal power or physically disappear, either by being murdered, as in Aceh, or exiled, as in Banten. The defeat they suffered erased one of the biggest advantages that urban society can grant to its members: greater social mobility. At the same time, one sees the establishment of an autocratic political system, very similar to those already common to the agrarian kingdoms of the region. At this point, an important remark must be added: documents inform us that in Banten, the leaders of the party willing to restrict royal power were merchants, foreigners, or persons of mixed parentage. Among them were the two highest officials of the country, originating from the Coromandel coast in India. This point cannot come as a surprise insofar as only an active population could generate a middle class, and economic activities were essentially restricted to people foreign to the land. We do not have the same detailed records at our disposal for Aceh, but the great similarity between the two movements lets us guess that the actors in that case must also have been foreign.

The monarchic reaction did not stop here. The kings of Aceh and Banten endeavored to establish a monopolistic policy by taking control, for the crown's profit, of the sale of pepper, the most valuable commodity produced in their countries. In spite of repeated attempts, that state monopoly never produced conclusive results, at least economically. While the new order was put into practice in the two kingdoms, the arrival of newcomers—the northern Europeans—in the archipelago's waters brought a host of troubles to the sovereigns and drove them to extremes. Curiously, the documents relating this very important moment are quite scarce. Those explaining the reasons behind this radical decision to lay claim to the pepper revenues are even fewer. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, in both Aceh and Banten, the kings ordered the uprooting of pepper plants in their countries in order to stop or at least significantly decrease the production of this spice. The main reason for this act of economic suicide was the aggressive behavior of Dutch and English fleets, both toward each other and toward the courts, in their endeavors to obtain their loads of pepper. Considering themselves unable to control these brutal merchants, who had not infrequently made use of their artillery pieces, the kings preferred to eradicate the

prize that had attracted them. It goes without saying that both countries' economies plunged into a deep decay from which Aceh never completely recovered and from which Banten did only after decades of painful economic difficulties, after which it was decided to plant new pepper trees.

All these events clearly reflect ideological debates concerning, economically, royal monopoly versus free enterprise, and, politically, monarchy versus oligarchy. It might be of some interest to have a closer look at these debates.

Ideological Crisis

It seems superfluous to dwell on the merchants' ideology, clearly based on individual merit and political control. I would rather try to determine the Malay social ideology that seems more difficult to understand.

An analysis of the cities might help us. From the perspective of outsiders, at least, the most striking feature of Banten and Aceh was their unusual appearance. Houses, built of vegetable materials, disappeared from view, hidden by fruit trees and shrubs. Foreign sources, European as well as Chinese, relate the puzzlement of travelers facing these densely populated conglomerations in which they recognize not cities, but merely huge villages. Streets hardly existed. The rare ones led to the royal compounds and had a more ritualistic than practical function. Even these were not paved, not even with stones, but were mere paths, indeed rather convenient for barefooted walkers, but also dusty or muddy depending on the season.

Stone generally was scarce—not to say inexistent—in buildings and monuments. As a result, at these sites practically no permanent structures remained from earlier times, except for an enigmatic building in the shape of a small circular tower, called *gunungan*, in Aceh, and in Banten a stone minaret erected in front of the mosque. Of course time, wars, and other events caused destruction, but contemporaneous sources do not provide any clue that more permanent structures existed in larger number in the past. Official buildings, such as palaces and shrines, were essentially wood constructions, as were all the private houses of the town. The sovereigns never thought of erecting monuments which, by their originality, their size, or their richness, would have embellished the city and maintained their names through the ages. Tombstones were the only structures that embodied the concept of monuments. That this situation resulted from a deliberate choice can be inferred from the fact that Malay people proved time and again their great mastery of stone construction in religious buildings. Moreover, in Banten, one only had to glance at the Chinese quarter across the river to see a wholly different idea of a town, with its rows of stone houses built on both sides of straight streets.

This attachment to a natural environment, even to the earth, can again be found in other aspects of these histories. We have just alluded to the tragic moment when both kings of Aceh and Banten ordered the uprooting of pepper trees in their territories. Simultaneously, they made the decision to turn traders who had lost their livelihood into peasants. One might argue that this attitude could, of course, be explained by their will to make their kingdoms self-sufficient. However, behind this decision, which might be interpreted as an act of good governance, there also lies in hiding a mistrust

in trade and an eagerness to keep in contact with earth and land. In the royal chronicle of another pepper-producing country, Banjarmasin, in Borneo, the court author recalls the wise words of a former king who opposed the danger of pepper growing while extolling the benefits of rice cultivation. A more telling example can be found in the policy of Sultan Ageng of Banten. In the first years of his reign, he enforced a monopolistic policy in pepper trade, but when confronted by its failure, he followed his Chinese councilors' advice and shifted to a more liberal one. That shift gave Banten the chance to become the greatest native commercial kingdom in the seventeenth century. Sultan Ageng was also the first Malay king who showed the will to possess his own merchant fleet, a decision that enabled him to make a profit not only, as usual, from cash crops production, but also from the transportation of those commodities to consumers' markets, and, finally, from trade in other goods, the latter activities being much more lucrative. At first glance, the king appears to have been truly merchant-minded. Reality seems to have been quite different, however. In these affairs, his role was limited to supporting a commercial venture conceived by European and Chinese merchants. He should only have credit for taking a financial share in this attempt, with the hope, of course, of gaining a return on his investment. When the actual actors disappeared, the king sold his ships and the venture came to a standstill.

If, as far as we know, this king never involved himself in trade, except by investing capital, he showed a passionate eagerness for agricultural development. Unceasingly, he launched new projects, digging canals, erecting dams, clearing forests, opening new lands, building new villages to which urban populations were relocated by the thousands. He even decided to transfer his court to one of the new villages where he settled, far from the busy city, devoting himself to agricultural projects so intensely that his behavior incurred not a few sarcastic comments from the traders. In my opinion, the tight link between society and land constitutes one of the main components of the Malay monarchic outlook.

Although after the revolution trade and contacts abroad were still carried out from all the Malay cities, merchants were put aside, left on the periphery of the state, and accepted only so long as they themselves accepted the new political order. In a sense, they were excluded from the "real" society, but at the same time they enjoyed enormous privileges, since the country depended on them for the bulk of its budget. This ambiguous status was apparently more easily accepted by Chinese merchants than by Indians, as the case of Banten shows. The former took the latter's place after the revolution. They acted as agents of the king and the gentry and never claimed more political power or demanded better social integration. They enjoyed a sort of monopoly in all the nonagricultural activities, having no native competitors to fear, and in spite of their limited citizenship, their condition could arouse envy among potential emigrants, mostly Chinese, who in the following years kept on coming in an uninterrupted flood.

One sees that, on the negative side, the advantages of the urban life did not find their way into these big cities. These societies had little more to offer than villages would for the improvement of individuals' lives and progress. Education was limited to the learning of prayers, and religious commentaries were, for the most part, mere repetitions of existing passages in books. Institutions intended to improve people's welfare were curiously lacking: there were no Malay hospitals, orphanages, or old

people's homes, though such institutions existed in Sri Lanka or China, for example, and though emigrants from those countries were living in the Malay cities. Obviously, the agrarian perception of each city by its rulers and the ethnic division of the society greatly contributed to curb a progressive evolution.

After this quick review of social organization, it would be of some interest to have a look at economic policy. These trading cities were relatively small states, but contemporary travelers' accounts describe them as well-off, and several of these accounts give rather precise details about kings' treasures that could be weighed in tons of gold, not to mention silver specie kept in quantities large enough to enable the state to act as a bank and loan huge amounts of money to traders. This raises the question of how this wealth was spent. As we have just seen, welfare institutions did not exist, nor did prestigious buildings, nor monuments. A labor force for public works and soldiers for wars were provided by the grandees from the local population they governed, which means labor costs were unlikely to have severely burdened the royal budget. Firearms had to be imported, but by reading the documents carefully, one notices that if indeed some cannons were purchased, many others were donated and others simply seized.

The greatest source of expenses could have been the decorum and pomp that surrounded the king's person and the gentry in official ceremonies and festivals. Even so, it is doubtful that golden clothes, jewels, horse or elephant caparisons, gilded boats, and other luxury goods could drain the fortunes of these flourishing trading cities. If we do not misinterpret the sources, we have to come to the conclusion that these riches were distributed, in rather small amounts but regularly, so that they left behind no trace in historical sources nor remains in archaeological sites. If this conclusion is true, it would fit rather well in the general framework of the society as we have pictured it, and it answers the enigma concerning the local population's source of revenues. One does not know where precisely the incomes of the Bantenese come from. When describing the Javanese town, European travelers spoke sarcastically about the laziness of its inhabitants. It is not the place here to enter into the debate on this topos of the western perception of the tropics; suffice it to point out that this term, "lazy," is not applied to the foreign quarters, and therefore that it described a way of life that seemed peculiar and difficult to understand for Westerners. For Banten, we have seen that the grandees drew their revenues from villages, pepper gardens, or salt panning. But it is very doubtful that these incomes covered their own expenses and those of their numerous bondsmen. Most of the accounts describe the gentry as not very wealthy, but they do not depict the Javanese population as poor in the same way they do the laborers living outside the royal city. That leads us to conclude that the king, or the state, provided the grandees with money in one way or another, thus helping to support their elite subjects in a way that mirrored the relationship between grandees and their dependent bondsmen and servants. All this means that a strict hierarchy could survive through this benevolent distribution of wealth and that, *in fine*, the king or the state had under its charge, partly at least, the whole Bantenese population of the town.

Islam

It has often been pointed out that Islam, born in a western context, was the bearer of concepts and ideas from that region, including such concepts as individuality, the preeminence of man over any creature, and oriented time. All these notions were in large part opposed to mentalities elaborated or acclimatized in the Malay world before the introduction of Islam to the region. In the cities under discussion, at the time that concerns us, the Islamic religion was already deeply rooted in the society. It is therefore worthwhile to scrutinize the extent and the direction of the evolution of mentalities under Muslim influence. Literature can provide helpful material here.

At first sight, all the literature produced in these three cities can be stamped as Islamic, since works seem to compete with each other in asserting their compliance to that religion. A closer look, however, enables us to distinguish two main trends.

The first trend includes works that attempt to integrate the Malay world into the large whole made up of Muslim nations, and that consequently try to give their own world the same references. One can find Malay translations or adaptations of books written in the Near East, genealogies connecting the Malay kings to heroes—famous for their religious or mundane deeds—from the Near East, as well as works depicting characters venturing on long and hazardous journeys in order to describe the greatness of the civilized world, narratives that match those originating from the Islamic countries. That literature, praising individual virtues, bravery, wisdom, or shrewdness and presenting to readers, or listeners, a world defined by its ideology and not by ethnic boundaries, is likely to have appeared in the fifteenth century and died out almost definitely in the mid-seventeenth century.

The second trend, essentially originating from the princely courts, had for its purpose to glorify the royal lineages, but was set within narrow spaces limited by “national” or, at best, Malay frontiers. This group of texts is of course made up of all the royal chronicles that occur in all our cities. It is striking to observe that in these works, the foreign countries with which these towns had continuous business relationships, or even the heterogeneous communities in these towns to whom they owed their prosperity, are not mentioned. This sort of literature, reflecting the royal ideology, might have existed at the same time as the former trend, but it becomes truly prominent in the Malay world during the seventeenth century.

In my opinion, this brief, too brief, description is likely to show that for a rather short period after its introduction, Islam succeeded in changing mentalities by integrating the Malay cities into a Muslim world, stretched from the Mediterranean to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, with its bases anchored in the West. Later on, Islam has progressively been adapted to local cultures through preferences given to ritual observance and a mysticism tending to abolish the distance between God and his creatures and thus to reduce its teaching to a monistic interpretation, easily suitable to the believers of other religions.

Other examples, besides literature, show the same process of reappraisal of local values and culture. Concerning Pasai, the principal kingdom of north Sumatra prior to Aceh, the chronicle of Malacca states that in its earlier period, Arabic and Persian languages were in use there, a situation confirmed by the Moroccan traveler Ibn

Battuta, who, during his visit to this city in the fourteenth century, seems not to have met with any linguistic difficulties in the social circles he frequented.

The statement of the Malaccan chronicle also implies that circumstances had already changed by the time it was written, and that in the fifteenth century these foreign languages were less or no longer understood among the elite, an obvious fact for the mystic poet Hamzah Fansuri, who chose to write in Malay, says he, in order to be understood by those ignorant of Arabic or Persian. And again the Malaccan chronicle remarks that a nobleman of that town was considered to be a learned man for the reason that he knew something of Arabic language and grammar.

In Aceh, by contrast with the other sultanates, there was a common habit of erecting tombstones with engraved inscriptions made up of pious formulas and the name and life dates of the deceased. All these inscriptions were written in Arabic until the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, a new trend arose with the engraving of pseudo inscriptions which retain from the original language only a symbolic image, of course unreadable and meaningless. Still in Aceh, whereas all the works used to be written in Malay, a language spoken over a wide area, for the first time in the seventeenth century a book written in the local idiom, Acehnese, appeared; from that moment it became the principal literary language. Therefore, the northern tip of Sumatra passed progressively from an international language, Arabic or Persian, to a regional one before at last adopting a local idiom.

One cannot but be struck by the synchrony between the social evolution, as each of these cities changed from a sort of—what I called—oligarchic republic to an autocratic monarchy, and the evolution of Islam from an alien belief, revolutionary in its new concepts, into a tamed religion, suited to local mentalities, and the transition in this region from an international language to a vernacular one. In all the cases, one can observe that references to a wide geographical area decrease and vanish to give place to a reassertion of the local values of old.

As we have seen earlier, the economic and political system that was established or restored in the trading cities during the seventeenth century was borrowed from the agrarian polities of the region, particularly although not exclusively, from Java. In order to implement this model in an urban and trading context, it had been necessary to come to use occupational and ethnic criteria. Dividing the population in this way made it difficult for there to be any mobility within the local society; the middle class was truncated, and foreign traders were prevented from playing a political role.

The trading sultanates were at this stage of their social evolution when the Europeans imposed their grip on the area. It is hard to guess how they would have changed had they preserved their freedom. It is obvious, however, that by relying for a long time on the support of local gentries, colonization has had lasting effects by freezing social structures which, as we have just seen, contained the seeds of a completely different evolution.